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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 VILNIUS 000153

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SUBJECT: FRENCH FM IN VILNIUS: OPTIMISTIC FOR IMPROVED
TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

REF: STATE 24447

Classified By: Pol/Econ Officer Christian Yarnell
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY: French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier, in Vilnius for consultations with Lithuania's political leadership two days after his meeting in Paris with Secretary Rice, spoke warmly of the Secretary's visit to Europe and publicly expressed optimism about the future of transatlantic relations. On the U.S.-EU relationship, Barnier said, "America needs a stronger Europe." Lithuanian leadership stressed with Barnier the importance of EU engagement in the Europe's New Neighborhood, but the French FM apparently did not endorse this as an EU priority, voicing concern about disturbing the EU-Russian relationship. The GOL took heart in the FM's interest in the U.S.-EU relationship, but worry about his (and Europe's) "special treatment" of Russia. END SUMMARY.

[12.](#) (C) French Foreign Minister Michel Barnier traveled to Vilnius February 10 for consultations with Lithuania's political leadership, including President Valdas Adamkus, Prime Minister Algirdas Brazauskas, Foreign Minister Antanas Valionis, and Speaker of Parliament Arturas Paulauskas. Neilas Tankevicius, from the Lithuanian MFA's European Union Department, was the Ministry's point man for the visit and provided us with a read-out February 11.

French FM Calls for Stronger Transatlantic Ties

[13.](#) (C) Barnier, according to Tankevicius, "warmly" described the Secretary Rice's visit to Europe and told the Lithuanians he appreciated the Secretary's "positive attitude" regarding the United States' relationship with Europe. Barnier said publicly that he is "optimistic" about the future of transatlantic relations. Privately, he told the Lithuanians that France hopes for increased transatlantic cooperation on a wide range of issues and believes Europe should play a larger role in Iraq.

[14.](#) (C) Tankevicius said that Barnier's primary message on the U.S.-EU relationship was that "America needs a stronger Europe." Barnier elaborated this theme during a speech at Vilnius University, remarking, "The United States needs a strong Europe for the fight against terrorism, to share responsibility for European peace and security, and to manage key elements of our political, economic, commercial, and environmental interdependence."

Lithuania's Pushes "New Neighborhood"

[15.](#) (C) GOL interlocutors emphasized, in conversations with Barnier, their commitment to democracy-building efforts in the former Soviet Union and their firm belief that the EU must actively support the region's integration with European institutions. Barnier praised Lithuania as a key player in forming EU policy towards Russia and other countries of the former Soviet Union. In response to Lithuania's expressions of interest in further developing European relationships with FSU countries, however, Barnier repeatedly questioned how such relationships would influence EU-Russia relations, and Tankevicius said the FM's tendency to view all such issues "through the Russian lens" perturbed Valionis and other GOL officials.

French Active on Power Plant

[16.](#) (C) Tankevicius told us that Barnier raised the issue of the Ignalina Nuclear Power Plant and said the French remain "very active" in discussions concerning nuclear energy. Adamkus and Brazauskas, Tankevicius noted, gave Barnier positive signals about the prospects for construction of a new nuclear reactor to replace Lithuania's two Soviet-era reactors at Ignalina. (One reactor went off-line at the end of 2004, while the other is scheduled for decommissioning in 2009.)

Comment: A Window of Opportunity?

17. (C) French FM Barnier's positive remarks in Vilnius about the importance of the transatlantic relationship were consistent with his statements (reftel) during Secretary Rice's February 8 visit to Paris. His remarks encouraged Lithuanian government officials, for whom maintaining and strengthening the transatlantic relationship is a primary foreign policy goal. These officials would like to see in Barnier's remarks the opening of a "window of opportunity" for a transatlantic rapprochement.
Kelly